



# Short Role-playing Simulations for World History Classrooms

*Richard Di Giacomo*

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This book is an exciting collection of role-playing simulations for Social Studies classrooms. Although most of the simulations are written for World and US History, some of them would work equally as well in Economics or Government classes. All of these simulations have been play tested in classes ranging from Junior High to High School and at ability levels ranging from sheltered classes to honors. What is a role-playing simulation? Role-playing simulations attempt to put the student in the position of a person in a particular time and place. Most of the simulations involve group problem solving and conflict resolution. The students are given a character sheet which describes the groups needs and desires, a brief description of the historical problem and a copy of the rules of the game. Familiarity with fantasy role playing games is a plus, but certainly not required. The individual assumes the role they choose and makes decisions as the character would make during that particular time period. No pre-set limits are placed on a particular person's choices as long as they are within the realm of what was historically possible. Because of the freedom to choose in these games the outcome is very unpredictable. No two classes finish the simulation in the exact same way which leads to some very interesting classroom discussions about why things turned out the way they did, what could have happened differently, and how the simulation compares to what actually occurred in history. How are these activities different from other simulations? Unlike many simulations that are commercially available, these games can usually be played in one or two class periods. Their open-ended nature allows for playing up to one week if time permits, but after a couple of days you will find that most of the possibilities have been exhausted and continued play will have only limited instructional value. Another key advantage to this system is the cost. Everything you need to play these simulations can be reproduced out of this book. There are no tiresome charts to deal with and minimal set up and cleanup time required allowing for maximum role-playing time. As much as possible, pieces have been kept to a minimum to make cleanup and storage easier and to keep costs down for teachers on a budget. The emphasis is on role-playing so that the student can get as much as possible out of their personal learning experience and not get tied up in the mechanics of a complicated rules system. How are the simulations used? The best way to use these simulations is at the beginning of a unit when students have little prior knowledge of the historical outcome of a particular conflict. This allows a clean slate for actions instead of a predictable imitation of history just because "That's the way it had to be". When the teacher does begin the regular instructional part of the unit, the students will automatically make comments like, "Wow! That is just like what happened in the game" or "Now I understand why they did what they did". We all know that students remember better what they do than what they heard or read about, so these simulations allow for an unforgettable experience, which will bring history alive for them. After the simulation is completed the teacher can lead a very interesting discussion of why things happened the way they did and how they might have turned out differently in the game or actually did turn out differently in other countries. This debriefing period is the most valuable portion of the activity. Students will be eager to participate because they were active stakeholders in the decisions made instead of passive listeners hearing about other people's problems from long ago. The activities build historical understanding, empathy for the viewpoints of others and group decision-making skills.

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